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THE MARTYR-PRESIDENT.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL, LEAVENWORTH,

ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

AND AGAIN BY REQUEST

ON THE NATIONAL FAST DAY,

JUNE 1st, 1865.

BY THE REV. JOHN H. EGAR, B. D.,

RECTOR.

LEAVENWORTH:

PRINTED AT THE BULLETIN JOB PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT.

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LEAVENWORTH CITY, KANSAS, June 1, 1865.

Rev. John H. Egar, Rector of the Church of St. Paul, Leavenworth, Kansas:

SIR: In common with many other of your parishioners, we desire to see the influence of the sermon preached by you this morning on the assassination of the late President extended to a wider circle than had the opportunity of hearing its delivery, believing that much good may be effected thereby; we would, therefore, most respectfully request a copy for publication in pamphlet form. Very respectfully, yours,

E. N. O. CLOUGH,
M. P. RIVELY,
GEO. W. NELLES.
JOHN KERR.
J. C. HEMINGRAY.

LEAVENWORTH, June 2, 1865.

Col. E. N. O. Clough, and others:

GENTLEMEN: Though my own judgment considers the sermon delivered by me yesterday to be not quite up to the standard which I think justifies printing, yet the suggestion of those who heard it, that good may be done by its circulation, leaves me no alternative but to place the manuscript at their disposal.

Yours respectfully,

JOHN H. EGAR.

SERMON.

"He being dead, yet speaketh."—Heb. XI, 4.

These words, as you remember, were spoken by St. Paul of Abel, the second son of our first father, Adam, whose short memorial in the Old Testament, seems to have been recorded as the type of the history of this wicked world; where what is good and noble, and pure, and true, seems to be foreign and alien, and to provoke the most malignant efforts of diabolical hatred. If we are ever tempted to forget that this world is not the home of goodness and truth, ever recurring experience brings it back to us; the intenser malice of our powerful and eternal enemy is aroused at the nearer prospect of their triumph; and the history of Abel recurs in every page of the larger history of universal humanity. The second son of our first father, Adam—the second person born into this world—the first person who died under the curse pronounced upon all mankind; the first victim of that terrible root of sin and crime planted in the world by the transgression of his parents, which bore fruit instantly in full and dire perfection of evil, was the innocent sufferer under the greatest, most dreadful crime of all that humanity is capable of—murder—assassination. The parallel in the fact re-produced in this last act of our national history, justifies the appropriation of the text to him whom the nation at this time mourns with a deep and swelling sorrow, its murdered President. "He being dead, yet speaketh." He speaks from a bloody grave, a martyr to the national integrity now all but re-established, by his fearful and inauspicious death, by his simple, blameless, single-hearted, earnest life; by his fulfillment of the high responsibilities of the chief station in the Government—speaks more emphatically, by the connection between this crime, and the crime against the nation; by the causality which the Divine will, without whose Providence no life is begun or ended, permitted to be the means of calling him away from the world. He died at the moment most fortunate for his fame; when the plans which he had matured were meeting their full success, when the instruments he had chosen had

justified his insight by their efficiency, when the vision of a re-united nation had risen fully above the horizon, and the dark night of national danger was merging into day; and his martyr's death will stamp all that is good in his history indelibly on the hearts of the people, and bind his memory by all that is good and holy and virtuous and patriotic—by the shame for the deed, and the sorrow at its success—by all that reverences authority, and all that respects character, and all that rises indignantly against crime—to the soul of the Republic, to live as long as history is read, and martyrdom consecrates the principles for which it is endured.

It is our duty, brethren, both in respect to the memory of our late Chief Magistrate, and also to fulfill all we can of our office, not only as teachers of religion but of virtue, to gather together according to our poor ability, the lessons which the present calamity—for a national calamity it is of the deepest character—presents to our minds. To this, then, let us address ourselves, praying for the Divine blessing to enable us to consider the subject with the words of Christian truth and soberness.

I. The crime of murder, considered without respect to station or any other extraneous circumstance—considered as against any one who bears our common nature—is one which is, and which needs to be met with the utmost abhorence. The murderer of whomsoever, high or low, is an object of Divine wrath, and the curse of God, and of the detestation and horror of all thinking people. But brethren, this crime—and it may have been permitted to teach us the sacredness of human life--sinks into the nation's heart deeper than can any private crime; not because it is physically less easy to kill a President than a private citizen, not because it needs a heavier bullet to do its fearful work; but because, in this conspicuous example, the moral foundation of our institutions is attacked, and the very law itself of our national and social being is assaulted in this dreadful crime. It is in vain to seek to disconnect it from the chain of causes which has brought upon the country all the devastation and bloodshed of the past years. We may, and for the honor of our common nature, we will hope that it is no part of the organized effort to disrupt the country—that it is the private act of a few desperate conspirators, too cowardly to stand in the ranks of open warfare; but it is none the less true, that it is a calamity and a crime growing out of the cause of all the other calamities which have afflicted the nation in every nerve of its manifold life; and, there-

fore, that the ultimate responsibility for it, as for all the other effects of this state of things, foreseen and unforeseen, must by dire necessity rest upon and be borne as best it may, by those whom the public opinion of the world will judge as the authors of all this mischief. It was as the executive of national law—the repository of constitutional power, exerted by mighty armies to preserve the unity of the nation, that the late President was the object of the individual hate of the worthless drunkard who took his life—aside from that no human being would have borne him malice—it was his responsibility in his office to uphold the trust which it was his above all others to uphold, which made him the assassin's mark. It was an effort against the very life of the nation; and it is this which arouses the terror and the sorrow that moves the nation to the depths of its nature. For if the minister of the law, be he high or low, be not safe in his person in carrying out those measures which are necessary for government—whether it be by marshalled armies or by individual police, makes no difference—where then is the guarantee of social order? where is the bulwark against wild anarchy and universal destruction? And this, brethren, it is, which is the underlying principle of this mighty struggle. The possibility of free government under the universal supremacy of law, whether our institutions were sufficiently strong to uphold the fundamental condition of our lives, our liberties and our manifold interests, though the universal obedience to those conditions of all the parts and sections of the country, East, West, North and South alike—it was against this, when armies had failed, that the assassin's hand was raised—raised, just at the moment when the solution of the question seemed to be attained—raised fearfully, with self avenging success, to spread its effects beyond the immediate criminals to the antecedent causes—to make the terms of reconciliation harder, and to repress the budding magnanimity of successful vindication by the stern resolve to exact the extreme penalty.

I do not say that this revulsion of feeling is desirable, and I do not say that it is not desirable. There is at this time and in this place a higher and a nobler use to be made of the terrible crime and awful calamity, than to make it the text of denunciation of that misguided people who are now suffering so fully the penalties of their great mistake. It is to take account of the virtues in the character of him whom we mourn. In the presence of so recent and so sudden and so terrible a death, the personal peculiarities

the minor mistakes, if any there were, the incidental trivialities, the partial misunderstandings, the party animosities are forgotten, and we seek for and dwell upon those great, broad, noble characteristics of our better nature, which are the deep substratum of humanity, and we seek to sum up the life-work of him who is taken away. And surely we cannot but recognize in one who, born in the floorless cabin of a Western wilderness, by his own industry, clear sightedness, honesty of purpose, and sympathy with the heart of the nation, won for himself the call to the seat of the great founder of the Republic, and who, under circumstances of equal responsibility and complexity with the birth-throes of the Revolution, so carried on the great work committed to him as not to be laid aside when the term of his first election ceased, those great qualities which made his pre-eminence of station not a mere fortuitous conjunction of accidents, but the testimony for all time, to a fitness for the work, to principles which were necessary and just and true, to an adaptation to the place and the occasion, sufficiently complete to give him a name in history by his own right. If we have any faith in humanity, if these earthly interests which compel so large a share of our time and thought and absorbing care, are realities of Divine Providence, if there is any hope of a triumph of human nature over its ills, and a real progress in the history of mankind, if God is the ruler of the world and his instruments are fitted to his operations, then "he being dead, yet speaketh," by an example, which in its essential particulars we may imitate, and a work which in its general scope and design his survivors must complete.

II. We may attribute to the deceased President, without fear that the judgment of history will reverse the decision, a conscientious devotion to the great trust with which he was charged, and an honest purpose to discharge it to the best of his understanding of its requirements, and of his ability to meet them. The proof of this is the course of his administration as a whole, and the complete revelation of the man in his endeavors towards the preservation and the permanent security of the nation's unity. It would be superfluous to attempt the enumeration of the acts in which this spirit showed most conspicuously; and in like manner it would be impertinent to offer an unlearned opinion upon any measures which he thought necessary to accomplish the end in view. There are doubtless those here present, the course of whose studies has been directed that way in the practice of a learned and laborous profes-

sion, at whose feet it would be my proper place to sit and be taught in matters of this nature ; and it is no derogation from them to say that he was at least their equal in that profession to which his life and theirs have been directed , and, therefore, that his opinion of the legal authority of these acts which have been the most dicusssed is neither to be confirmed nor called in question by those like myself, whose studies, if they are faithful to *their* high calling, are turned in another and widely different direction. The tribunal of ultimate decision on such questions is neither the pulpit nor the press. It is ours to look, in this place, not at the legal formalities which limit and define actions in their external shape, but, as far as we can, at the inner spring and source of the life which animates them. And I am confident that all, however, divided in opinion respecting the particular measures developed by the course of events, whether they seemed to them too fast or too slow, too mild or too severe, will agree, now that the end is seen, that the spirit and intention of the man and the magistrate, shining through all the difficulties of position and circumstance, in a state of things unprecedented in the history of the world, was a highly conscientious, honest, patriotic spirit. He was in his exercise of the powers of the Government, a patriot and not a politician. The two are wide apart. The difference between them is indelibly stamped upon the perceptions of all right-minded and intelligent men. The general voice of public opinion speaks of the one with contempt as surely as of the other with approval ; and the difference between them is simply that of the internal, conscious rectitude and conscientousness and devotion to principle and to country—the unselfish devotion to duty and to responsibility,—which contrasts, by the whole space between light and darkness, with the hollow, insincere, selfish, mean and crooked course of unprincipled greed and unhallowed ambition.

We may add to this sterling integrity, as another evident part of his character, a judicious firmness and a practical wisdom in the development of his plans and the selection of his instruments, and a clear perception of the times and steady consistency in shaping the progress of events toward the attainment of the end in view. It is evident that he was, as his position required him to be, the master-spirit in his Cabinet ; that his subordinates were subordinate, and that, though he called statesmanlike ability and organizing tact, and trusty council to his side, yet that his actions were his own, and, therefore, that *he* is to be judged by the success of his measures,

and not stinted by the reward they return. It was his labor, not only to prevent the present disruption of the nation, but to secure, if possible, its permanent and lasting pacification; to keep the nation one, not only for the few years of his term of office, but as far as in him lay, to dig the foundations of a broader and deeper structure of unity and prosperity for the common country of us all. He lived long enough to see the beginning of the end for which he labored. The result must tell in the centuries that are to come, whether he has been successful; but this at least is clear, that as he was conscientiously and honestly devoted to his work, so he brought to it those qualities of character, that firmness of purpose, that practical wisdom in planning, that judicious discrimination of opportunity in executing, that insight in chosing his chief helpers, that singleness of aim, and power of seizing on circumstances to set forward that aim, which, under the irresistible logic of events, has approved itself to the people as sagacious, and consistent, and necessary, and which we may hope, under God's blessing, will result, not only in re-uniting our country, but in perpetuating its peace, and adding to the happiness and prosperity of all sections and of every individual.

And here again we cannot too highly appreciate these qualities of the late President, in their effect upon the destiny of the country. The singular freedom of his nature from all dramatic effect or rhetorical artifice blinds us to the weight of his influence, until we carefully analyse the exact history of the times. It is one thing to see the judiciousness of measures after they have succeeded, it is another thing to foresee their effect; and this was his prerogative. The ability to reduce order out of the chaos of public opinion, to lead the preponderating power of the country, by a steady progress, step by step, to unity of opinion and steadiness of resolve, as the necessary antecedent to external unity restored, to be firm in judgment and merciful in disposition, and so to temper each with the other, as to sacrifice neither, to adapt the policy to the circumstances and yet to keep in view the single end of all operations, was not less necessary for the nation, than evident in him who had the destinies of the nation in his earthly keeping. It requires no extraordinary memory to recall the vacillation and uncertainty which held the minds of men in unbearable suspense, during the months immediately preceding and at the beginning of his incumbency. The press of those days was united upon none

of the issues involved. Party maxims had no authority upon which to ground an opinion as to the course to be pursued. The uncertainty was not only as to the next step to be taken, but as to the general direction in which to move. It was a period of anxious waiting for the authoritative voice of the government; and never, perhaps, in the history of the nations, was there a time when government was so thrown upon itself to be in truth the leader and director of the people, as in those days of the beginning of the modern history of the Republic. There was no organized and settled public opinion to indicate the way, no path beaten by the footsteps of old established precedent, or surveyed and mapped out by the logic of precise theory, in which the nation knew that it was to march. Men turned to the new and untried administration as the only guide in their perplexity. The strong deep instinct of devotion was in their hearts, but the way in which to exert it was not plain. And yet in this time of suspense, the utterances of the government were not hasty and unreflecting. The suspense might be painful; but the consequences of a false estimate of the position would be fatal. And when the government did develop its method of procedure, the course pursued reflected equal lustre upon the practical sagacity of the head of the nation, and the true loyalty to authority of the mass of the people. The principle of obedience to the constituted depositaries of the law, because they are clothed with the authority of the law, (which is the only true meaning of the word loyalty, and upon which the very existence of our institutions depends) receives its most sublime illustration in the spontaneous response which met fully the demands of the government as soon as its will was declared — the more marked as following upon the preceding uncertainty — proves that the sense and realization of constituted authority, as distinguished from mere personal influence or personal opinion, is a stable foundation of our national freedom. And that that confidence thus fully given at first was never afterwards withdrawn—that amid all the impatience of some, and the hostile criticism of others, the people still recognized and confided in him for their leader, is proof sufficient that that leader had the sound practical judgment which the occasion required, adapted his action to the times, made a fit selection of associates in council and subordinates in action, and pursued his general course in the exigencies of the nation, with a wisdom and independence and a straight forwardness as rare as they were ne-

cessary to adapt to the principles by which he was guided, the public mind and temper by which he must be sustained.

And thirdly, we may discover in the late President, an unfailing faith in the rectitude and the final triumph of the principles which he brought to the administration of public affairs. The circumstances under which he entered upon his incumbency of his high office were such as might have made any man falter; but he kept heart, and infused it into the people, and secured them to himself, because he had principles and he had faith in them. He had, as I have already remarked, comparatively no training in statesmanship; but it might have been that such training would have been gained at the expense of principle. A long and exclusive devotion to public life is apt to sink the patriot into the politician — and, steady principle wanting, no practical wordly wisdom will supply its place. This can be obtained in subordinates, that cannot be dispensed with in the chief. His election was an infusion of new blood into the decaying vitals of public affairs — the elevation of one immediately from among the people; who, being in sympathy with the popular heart should confirm and steady it, and keep it true to the aspirations which it honestly entertained. And indeed, through all his character this was prominent, his being one with the mass of the people in all their better nature — his kindliness of heart, and geniality of temper, his unassuming manners and frank directness of speech and address, — all that is public and all that is private in his character and actions, now that the mists of prejudice are swept away by his sad and sudden death — will be recognized as of one who was emphatically of the people, and a leader among their hosts.

And indeed, it was this thorough honesty and straight-forwardness of character—this simple rectitude in private as well as in public life, which was his great strength with the people of the country. Even those who made his election to the Chief Magistracy the pretext of the attempt to break up the Union, feel and confess that they have lost in him their best and truest friend. And it may be, by that Providence which brings good out of evil, that his martyrdom may exert an influence more potent than any other cause to turn the hearts of the disobedient children of the Republic to the Government of their Fathers. There are arguments plausible enough to those who are under their influence for the appeal to arms; but the crime of assassination is too palpable to the

most obtuse mind not to produce a horror of the cause which it is sought to advance by such means. In such a death, the scales drop from the eyes of prejudice, and of hatred itself, and the conscience opens to the real moral conditions involved. The world does him justice now, and sees that in him the nation sought to its foundations and quarried the strong tough granite of simple honesty and uncorrupted sincerity for the base of her re-edification. Comparatively unknown before his selection for the Presidency, and altogether unused to the arts which are the stock-in-trade of the professional statesman—the trivial expedients by which party politicians postpone action and evade responsibility, and hide under precedent and do nothing with busy earnestness, he came to the con duct of public affairs, at a time when such arts would have been chaff in the whirlwind, with a strength in the rugged instincts of natural virtue which was better than all art, more timely than all expediency, truer than all precedent, and equal to all responsibility. The times required a recurrence to first principles; they were past dallying with according to the recognized forms of parliamentary and political inaction. Years and years before the spirit of secession became overt rebellion it was a deep and solemn question in the minds of thinking and religious men, whether the nation was not about to be broken up; whether it could live with the corruption and dishonesty circulating in its life-blood, which selfish politicians had infused into its veins and arteries. The tactics of party had well nigh stifled government itself. Shrewdness and astuteness and cunning had so overlaid the true wisdom of righteousness with the multiplicity and success of their arrangements for moving the masses, that honest and sincere men washed their hands of the consequence, and retired from the unequal contest with the professional gambler in the spoils of office. The evil brooding in sullen shapeless darkness upon the face of the land, took shape more suddenly than was looked for, and ere men woke to the reality, the crisis was upon them. It was a day when the ordinary maxims of political action had no force. Something more was necessary than office-seeking cunning, and the art of bargain and sale. That Providence which rules mankind, made him the available man, and so guided his election, and brought to the Chief Magistracy his sterling honesty, his sound unsophisticated sense of right and wrong, his uncorrupted mind and heart. During the four years of his first incumbency, the nation learned that the simplicity and the directness of a recurrence to first principles—to

honor and honesty and justice and truth—are the only sure foundation of stability and permanence. A second election was a tribute to the broad, genial characteristics of an honest Western life, stamping it with approval after the fiery trial. And now, though his perishable body is laid in its mother earth, he himself stands in history like one of the granite statues which face an old Egyptian temple, the representative of what the men of this nation must be, and of what, by the discipline of God, we hope and believe they are becoming through the purifying crucible of the national tribulation. And it may be another reason for the permission by Providence of this tragedy, that the country needed it to fix the lesson forever in the hearts of men. The principle of martyrdom consecrates and hallows every witness to great and holy truth. The baptism of blood and the crown of fire are everywhere the Divine symbols of the ultimate triumph of the right. The martyred President would have been none the less honest, none the less kind, none the less sincerely desirous to save even his enemies, had he not been stricken down; but he would not have passed into history with the same nimbus of glory that now surrounds his memory. His image would not have struck so deeply into the heart of the nation, and the force of his example, and the purity of his life, and the grandeur of his character would have failed of half their lesson to posterity. Even now, let us hope, there is in the atmosphere around us the impulse of a better, higher, more noble aim for our energies. God grant that this impulse may exert its full effect upon our own generation and upon those who are to come after us.

III. It is a judgment which history will confirm, that the position of the nation this day, — its ordered movement through the hurried series of events of the past four years — the germinant principles of its future course — owe as much to the personal characteristics of the man thus feebly and imperfectly sketched, as to any other single human instrumentality. A people can no more act in unity and concert without a leader in sympathy with their instincts, than an army without a general in whom they have confidence. The late President is one of the main links which bind the future to the past. It needs only to contemplate the different possibilities which might have come to pass, contrasting them with what is now the accomplished fact, to see this. Circumstances and the man combine to make up the lesson of his history, and neither is an empty cypher. Without the circumstances the man would

have lived comparatively unknown, and died unmarked; without the man, the circumstances might have developed differently. The examples in history of rulers who have not risen to the height of great occasions are too numerous not to be capable of application to illustrate the possible condition of a President unequal to the task. Four years ago there seemed to be two at least, — and perhaps many—different possibilities. Unity, or Disunion, or Universal Anarchy depended, humanly speaking, upon the administration. In the progress of the nation from its infant existence to its growth over half a continent, there had developed too great diversity of social states, as the principle of discord. Moral ideas on the one side, and material interests on the other, entered into conflict,and the time had come to solve permanently the question whether diverse social states should develop into diverse nationalities, or whether national unity should be preserved by making the social state everywhere the same. Two answers were possible then; one has been given now, never to be reversed, by the grace of Providence using him as its chief instrument. The institution of slavery has fallen before the principle of national supremacy, the guarantee that the country once pacified will remain permanently secure. With this guarantee, his great work, all lesser question, are of no importance. Not that it is due to him alone. Ideas and forces had to be called into activity and guided to their results, and without them he would have been powerless. But as the helmsman at the wheel guides the direction of all the forces (none of which he could originate) which give motion to the ship; so it was his, here to restrain, there to impel onward, and so to bring the ship of state thus far on its course.

The work, brethren, is not yet ended. It is our country which has suffered, though it triumphs in its suffering. After war comes peace; and the result of war at this moment is so sure and certain, that all can look for peace in the shortest, surest way, — peace that shall be permanent and enduring. It is the business of the people now to heal the nation's wounds. The same God who called him by the people's voice to the helm, and granted him to see so much accomplished, still rules in Heaven, and has frustrated the plot to throw the government into confusion, has preserved his successor, and assigns our pathway between those fences of Mercy and Judgment which hedge round all human walks, whether of the individual or the community. "By Him kings rule, and princes

decree justice." It may suit the presumption which reckons itself competent to proclaim beforehand on every occasion the secret counsels of the Almighty and Infinitely Wise Being, who has declared that "His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways," to expound what is or what ought to be the policy henceforward of the Government, the chief depositary of whose power has been changed by Divine permission and by human crime. I humbly decline the endeavor. I believe in the Providence of God, and that that Providence vindicates itself in the result, though its counsels may not be known beforehand, except by prophetic Inspiration; and I am sincerely of the opinion, that they who by that Providence are vested with the trust taken from the hand of him we mourn, are abundantly competent to consider their responsibilities without my advice, and to resolve wisely and to act well. Providence calls us to the humbler duty of obedience to the powers that are by His ordaining. To them it is for us to look for guidance, and for them it is ours to pray, that God will give them the wisdom and the strength to secure to our posting the heritage given to our fathers, and to bring the storm-tossed ship of state, securely into the harbor of a stable and permanent peace.

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